



## *Serving our Asian American and Pacific Islander Elders*

The Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population is living longer, growing older, and becoming more diverse. Demographers anticipate that all segments of the older American population will increase, with the greatest increase—358 percent—in the older Asian American and Pacific Islander group.

### **Diversity of AAPI Elders**

The AAPI population consists of more than 30 ethnic groups, each with unique languages, cultures, religions, socioeconomic status, and education levels. The larger groups of Asian Americans include Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Asian Indians, and Koreans. Pacific Islander elders include people of Micronesia, Polynesia (Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Tongans, and Tahitians), and Melanesia.

### **Health and Chronic Illnesses**

AAPI and other minority elders have higher rates of many chronic diseases and illnesses. Consequently, they have a significant need for nutrition, health care, and preventive health services such as vaccinations. Over the long term, these health disparities result in a reduced quality of life. While the Medicare program covers vaccinations against pneumonia, only 27 percent of the older AAPI population have received a vaccine.

Established under the Older Americans Act of 1965, the Administration on Aging (AoA) is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). AoA is an important part of the HHS initiative, “Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health 2010,” and awarded four demonstration grants to help end health disparities among older members of racial and ethnic minority populations. These projects will develop culturally sensitive, community-based health promotion and disease prevention programs. In California, the Special Services for Groups, Inc. of Los Angeles will lead a community coalition to educate individuals of Southeast Asian and Pacific Island descent on preventing cardiovascular disease and diabetes and increasing adult immunizations. They will:

- Identify culturally appropriate prevention activities;
- Encourage the adoption of healthy lifestyles that acknowledge and integrate appropriate cultural practices and diets; and
- Increase access to medical and health interventions.

### **Family Caregiving**

The typical Asian American Pacific Islander caregiver is a female, age 39 who works either full or part-time. AAPI caregivers are the least likely of all population groups to seek professional assistance for coping with the stress of caregiving.

### **AAPI Elders and Income**

Many AAPI elders immigrated to the United States and worked in low-paying jobs without retirement benefits. Data from the U.S. Census in 1998 show that 12 percent of AAPI elders live below the poverty line compared to only 5 percent of the older non-Hispanic white population. This may not be immediately apparent because many AAPI elders live with their adult children and grandchildren.



## Education

There are important discrepancies in education level between the older AAPI population and their older adult counterparts nationwide:

Population	Less than 9th Grade Education	Lack of High School Diploma	High School Graduate	Some College/ College Degree
AAPI Elders	39%	14%	22%	25%
Older Adults Nationwide	26%	21%	28%	26%

## Culturally Sensitive Meal Services

Twenty-seven percent of AoA's congregate and home-delivered meal program participants are minority elders. AoA is working with the national aging network to develop and implement culturally sensitive nutrition services.

## Town Meetings with Asian American Pacific Islander Elders

The National Asian Pacific Center on Aging oversees AoA's "Community-Based Capacity-Building for Asian/Pacific Islander Elders Project." This project includes a series of capacity-building activities and town meetings in ten areas with large Asian American Pacific Islander communities. These meetings are conducted in the languages spoken by the participating AAPI groups and serve a twofold purpose: providing information, technical assistance, and capacity building; and determining if local services meet the needs of AAPI elders.

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA is the official Federal agency dedicated to policy development, planning and the delivery of supportive home and community-based services to older persons and their caregivers. The AoA works through the national aging network of 57 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 225 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:

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